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ILLUSTRATED BOOKS AND  
RELIEF PRINTS

FOR convenience' sake the illustrated books and single sheet relief prints in the Fiftieth Anniversary Exhibition will be treated together. Of the books there are 88, and of the framed prints 145, which have been selected as though they were to serve as the illustrations for a handbook of the subject. With few exceptions the prints come from the collections of the Museum, as do a large number of the books, the remaining items, many of which are exceedingly rare and important, having been lent by friends of the Museum, among whom may be mentioned Emil Baerwald, Ogden Codman, W. B. O. Field, Robert Hartshorne, Howard Mansfield, Mortimer L. Schiff, Felix M. Warburg, and William Augustus White.

The material in the exhibition is extensive enough to warrant the writing of a treatise, but space limitations are so great that a most summary account, in which only a few of the more important items can be referred to, must suffice for the time being.

The exhibition begins with a group of fifteenth-century German painted religious prints of the primitive type, the earliest of which is thought to have been made sometime about 1430. The latest item in the galleries is Howard Pyle's *Wonder Clock*, illustrated with relief etchings, which was published in New York in 1888, and is still one of the favorites of the nursery as well as one of the most beautiful books ever produced in America. Between these two extremes there are to be found fine and typical examples of most if not all of the more important phases through which the relief print and the book illustration have passed in their long history.

There are two pages from one of those German fifteenth-century block-books which traditionally are regarded as having marked the transitional stage between the woodcut and the book printed from movable types, and in the case with them are a number of the more important illustrated German and Dutch incunabula, such for example as the *Ulm Boccaccio* of 1473,

Neumeister's 1479 edition of *Turrecremata* with its curious metal cuts, and the *Mainz Breydenbach* of 1486, which was not only the first book to be illustrated by a known artist, but that one which William Morris declared to be the most beautiful Gothic book. In a neighboring case is a group of the most noteworthy German books of the first half of the sixteenth century, there being among them three of the volumes illustrated by Dürer, notably the *Life of the Virgin* of 1511, the pictures in which are regarded by some critics as his finest woodcuts, first editions of Holbein's *Old Testament* and his *Dance of Death*, selected proofs from which are in the frames upon the walls, and the first edition of Hans Sebald Beham's *Typi in Apocalypsi Joannis*.

Three cases are filled with Italian books of the Renaissance, notable among them the famous *Brescia Dante* of 1487 and that printed at Florence in 1481, which is celebrated not only for its illustrations "by Baccio Baldini after Botticelli," but as having been the second or third book to be illustrated with copper plates. The other Florentine books with the exception of Calandri's *Arithmetica* of 1491, the first arithmetic in a vulgar tongue, are the little religious tracts that appeared during the Savonarolan revival, the woodcuts in which are among the loveliest ever made. The fifteenth century in Venice is represented by the *Meditations of Bonaventura*, and editions of the *Lives of the Fathers*, *Aesop*, *Petrarch*, and *Livy*, and the celebrated Aldine *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* of 1499, long renowned as the most beautiful book ever made. There are also Ratdolt's 1485 edition of *Sacrobosco*, which contains what are possibly the earliest examples of color block printing, and Ketham's *Fasciculus Medicine*, with illustrations stenciled in color. Examples of later Venetian book-making are the *Vallisumbrosan Misal* and *Verdizotti's Cento Favole*, while other Italian schools are represented by such items as the *Neapolitan Aesop* of 1485, the *De Claris Mulieribus* of Bergomensis made at Ferrara in 1497, *Vigerius' Decachordon Christianum* of 1507, and the *Como Vitruvius* of 1521.

Two cases contain French books of the Gothic and Renaissance periods, notably two of the three great Abbéville books, St. Augustine's *City of God* and *Le Triumphe des Neuf Preux*. The *Missale Parisiense* of 1489, Verard's *Paris et Vienne* of 1498, and a page with the cut of the Coronation of the Virgin from his *Horae* of February 6, 1485, the earliest illustrated Book of Hours, are typical of the earlier Parisian work. The later development of the Book of Hours is typified by the *Vostre-Pigouchet Horae* of August, 1498, and one printed by the junior Kerver which contains illustrations by Geoffroy Tory. Sixteenth-century work is represented by Bernard Salomon's *Ovid*, Salel's *Homer* of 1545, *L'Entrée du Roi*, illustrated by Tory, and Jean Cousin's *Livre de Perspective* of 1560.

The single prints in the frames contain a group of masterpieces by Dürer, such for instance as the portrait of Varnbuler, Saint George and the Dragon, the Flagellant, and proofs from the *Apocalypse* and *Marienleben*, a number by Burgkmair, prominent among them the wonderful *chiaroscuro* of *Death and the Lovers*, several by Hans Baldung, including the *Adam and Eve*, the *Witches' Sabbath*, and the *Crucifixion*, two of Wechtlin's *chiaroscuros*, and a fine group of Cranachs, among which may be noticed the *chiaroscuro* of Saint Christopher, the *Rest on the Flight*, and the *Tournament with Samson and the Lion*. On a neighboring wall are shown many proofs from Holbein's *Dance of Death*, and his portrait of Erasmus with the *Term*, which disputes with Dürer's Varnbuler the position of greatest of woodcut portraits. There is also a group of Altdorfers, principally from his *Passion Series*, and his *Rest by the Fountain*. The Netherlands are represented by a group of Lucas of Leydens, notably the *Abraham and Isaac*, and four of his large prints of pagan and Hebrew kings and heroes.

The Italian black and white woodcut of the Renaissance is represented by an early Venetian *Pietà*, Domenico Campagnola's *Saint Jerome in the Desert*, the *Master I. B.* and the *Bird's Ganymede*, Boldrini's *Venus and Love*, and a large

metal-cut portrait of Charles V. The group of *chiaroscuros* includes the *Massacre of the Innocents* by "N.D.B.," Ugo da Carpi's great *Diogenes* and the *Reading Sibyl* for which he received a patent from the Venetian Signoria, Boldrini's *Young Peasant on Horseback*, and Caravaggio's *Ajax* and *Agamemnon*.

Among the later Netherlandish work are several of the impressive black-and-whites cut by Jeghers after Rubens' designs, and a group by Goltzius, among them the *Sorcerer*, *Mars*, and the *Landscape with the Waterfall*.

During the later half of the sixteenth century and until the early years of the nineteenth there was little fine woodcut book illustration, the fashion having turned to the use of engravings and etchings for the purpose. Typical of the earlier phase of the copper-plate book is such an item as the *Grandes Voyages* of de Bry, but interesting as this and the similar books are, this method of book illustration did not reach its apogee until the eighteenth century in France when such remarkable things were produced as the *Costume Physique et Morale* and the *Oeuvres de Rousseau* illustrated by Moreau le jeune, and the *Contes* of La Fontaine illustrated by Fragonard. Among other items of this period may be mentioned the *La Fontaine of the Fermiers Généraux* with Choffard's tail pieces, the *Baisers* of Dorat illustrated by Eisen, and the edition of the *Temple de Gnide* in which not only the illustrations but the letter press is engraved. English book illustration of the eighteenth century is represented by Blake's *America*, which, in addition to its downright beauty, has the peculiar technical interest of having been illustrated with relief etchings.

Copper-plate illustration lasted in England almost to the middle of the last century, and was assiduously cultivated by both publishers and artists, typical specimens of whose taste and skill may be seen in the plates by Rowlandson for Dr. Syntax, and by Rowlandson and Pugin for the *Microcosm of London*, by Finden after Turner for Rogers' *Poems*, and by Cruikshank for Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. But the

vogue of the copper plate was unable to withstand the revival in popularity of wood engraving which was brought about by the publication of Bewick's *British Birds* in 1798 and 1804. Bewick's work was followed by Rogers' *Pleasures of Memory* with the charming vignettes that Stothard and Clennel produced, Thornton's *Virgil* with Blake's remarkable illustrations to the *Pastorals*, the lovely little cuts by Calvert, and the astounding technical virtuosity that was lavished upon the illustrations for Savage's *Practical Hints on Decorative Printing*.

In the thirties the French publishers again began to issue woodcut books and for a space of a little over twenty years produced a series of such masterpieces as the *Paul et Virginie* of 1838 with illustrations by Johannot, Isabey and Meissonnier, the *Némésis Médicale*, *La Grande Ville*, and *Les Français Peints par Eux-Mêmes*, full of masterpieces by Daumier, Gavarni, and others. This period of the French woodcut may conveniently be considered to have terminated with Meissonnier's *Contes Rémois* of 1858, and the isolated woodcuts of Jean François Millet.

In 1857 the pendulum swung back to England again with the appearance of that illustrated Tennyson which first gave Rossetti, Hunt, and Millais their wide fame. It was followed by a series of remarkable books such as Millais' *Parables of Our Lord* and the Dalziel's *Arabian Nights* which contained Boyd Houghton's masterpieces. In the eighties England through the efforts of Edmund Evans, the printer and publisher, produced a series of children's books, the most prominent designer for which was possibly Kate Greenaway, in which printing from wood blocks in colors reached its highest practical development.

Germany during the last century saw much work done on the wood block, notably such things as the magnificent single sheet print of *Death as Friend* by Rethel, the books illustrated by Menzel, among which stands out *La Cruche Cassée*, and

by Richter, whose *Bechstein's Maerchenbuch* has long since become one of the nursery classics of the world.

In America, great as the output was, there is little that will stand comparison with European work, most of the very great effort having gone into frankly reproductive work of a kind that would have been impossible without the intervention of the camera. Marvelous as the technique that the engravers developed was, it is unable to withstand the fact that deprived of great draughtsmen it was a technique of translation without positive merits of its own. Not until the general introduction of process in the eighties was any book illustration of native importance produced, Howard Pyle's *Wonder Clock* being perhaps the finest contribution made by any American artist to the history of the illustrated book.

Considering the graphic arts as a whole, it is perhaps permissible to think that of them all the relief print affords the most varied interest. There can be no question that it has played a larger and more important part in the history of civilization than any of the others, if only for the fact that it has been the typical form of book illustration during the two periods of the greatest expansion of human thought, and has yielded itself as easily and cheaply to the most menial of tasks as it has magnificently arisen to the most splendid of opportunities. Of all the graphic media it is the commonest, the supplest, and the simplest, and commands a range of qualities and effects that none of the others has attained. And just because of all this it has rarely been seriously regarded by the collector and the student of art. Being man's valet it has never been his hero, but would we find out about men we must go to it, just as we go to that other and familiar art which he uses and enjoys without conscious thought, the art of words. It surely is no accident that the two should come together, bound up in books.

W. M. I., JR.